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## TRAINING FOR RURAL LEADERSHIP

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The question of leadership in rural life has assumed much importance during the course of the discussion that has taken place and the investigations which have been made relative to country life problems during the past few years. Quite in agreement with the findings in other fields of human effort the importance of the personal factor has emerged as the problems of rural communities have become better understood. The traditional tendency, to elevate the personal factor above all other elements in the situation, first asserts itself when new social problems arise and men turn their attention toward discovering solutions; it is asserted that it is inconsequential to change the form of organization, since if individuals are right all will be well. The radical reaction from this view consists in the stressing of organization; the attitude being assumed that if the perfect form of organization can be found and adopted the social utopia will have been realized. But eventually the intelligent conclusion is reached that since society is an assembly of organizations which human beings use to realize their interests, neither the human nor the structural factors can be disregarded but that a greater perfection of institutions is a necessary attainment for the realization of more perfect men.

To generalize, it may be asserted that the attitude of the rural population concerning its own problems has run the course of these three stages. The first attitude was the passive one of taking dogmatic teaching for granted and allowing things to drift. When the rural problem arose in its full significance, almost the entire emphasis was placed on organization, so that reorganization became the shibboleth, and the economic factor received almost exclusive consideration. But with the passage of time the farmers have become wiser and, imbued with a larger degree of humanistic sentiment, they are now discussing what sort of institutions will turn out the best men and women. And it is very significant that the perception has gradually arisen that a rural leadership is an indispensable means to the attainment of permanent improvement.

## THE MEANING OF LEADERSHIP

The significance of leadership cannot very well be observed until a somewhat definite meaning is attached to the term. The necessary implication of the word may be brought into perspective by the use of particular cases. A dirty urchin and an aristocratic lady alike exercise the function of leadership in respect to a dog through the instrumentality of a chain, in which cases physical superiority and necessitous instincts play the chief rôle. Superficially, the gaily attired drum major marching at the head of a band is the epitome of the leader, for does not the band go where he leads and does it not respond to his spectacular gyrations? Yet the cynical doubtless would assert that he exercises less influence over the band than on the minds of the spectators and that his chief asset resides in his gay uniform and spectacular movements. Then there is the body of troops who under its commander goes through the manual of arms, and performs all sorts of field maneuvers, filing right and left, marching and countermarching. Surely the commander is the genuine leader. But so far, he is only a drill master and the responses which his troops make are purely formal and mechanical, not due to individual initiative and foresight, but to the will of a superior officer clothed with absolute authority.

Thus by a process of exclusion and assent we arrive at the point where it is seen that leadership must be invested with certain characteristics and qualifications which enable it to exercise particular functions relative to free but susceptible human beings. I shall express in a few words what I consider the prime requisites of a productive rural leadership, namely, the power of initiative, organizing ability, sympathy with human aims, trained intelligence, and vision or outlook. That these qualifications must be present in the individual who assumes the function of leadership, at least to a measurable degree, and that their absence in a working form from all of the inhabitants of any given community precludes the possibility of the manifesting of any resident leadership in that particular community, are statements which probably will prove acceptable to all.

## THE FUNCTION OF THE LEADER

In order that the place and function of the leader in the rural community may be intellectually visualized it may be well to depict and exposit the sociological view of the rôle of the exceptional

man in relation to society and the community. The well balanced sociological view puts the capable individual into the relationship with the concept of social progress, not making him exclusively responsible for it, as does the "great man" theory of Carlyle, not investing him with exclusive power to bring about changes in society; but constituting him a very essential factor in the realization of movements and transformations which advance collective interests. Within the scope of this limited conception, then, that part of progress which is due to direct human intervention is brought about by the few human beings who constitute the innovating class. By reason of their inborn capacity and developed ability they constitute an exceptional class. Out of this class arise the inventors, discoverers, creators of all kinds of new ideas whether social or "material." Without this class of innovators the structure of society would remain relatively fixed and the readjustments which are essential to secure a greater measure of satisfaction would not take place.

In striking contrast with this small class the great mass of human beings living in any particular society are regarded as static relative to society. Were the affairs of society to be left with them exclusively, they would forever remain as they are and have been, except for the perturbations set up by means of other agencies. Instead of having innovating, creating minds, these people are endowed with imitating minds. They are able to follow example, to fashion after the models already produced, but not to initiate, in the sense of projecting the new. As a consequence the preponderating majority of people are followers only.

In seeking to apply this conception, which, I think will be agreed, essentially depicts the historic situation, it at first thought might be concluded that if a community possessed no rare individuals of the first class it could not hope to make progress, unless happily it could borrow innovators. This makes necessary a closer inspection of the second, the imitating class, to discover if the case is that extreme, and fortunately there are signs sufficient to renew our shrinking optimism. Since democracy is so largely constituted of common people it is a satisfaction to learn that there is no such thing as a "dead level" in it which is inevitable.

Recalling the statement which was previously made regarding the qualifications a leader must have—initiative, organizing ability,

sympathy, trained intelligence, outlook—it is apparent that an imitative mind may possess all of these attributes, and as a consequence it may prove serviceable as a community leader. It does not follow that a talented person could not perform a greater work, or that an effort should not be made to retain and develop all the latent talent possible in rural districts. When it is recalled that most of the businesses are operated by the imitating class and that the great majority of governmental agents have merely imitative minds, it becomes apparent that the non-creative mind may have sufficient intelligence to appreciate what has been worked out by others elsewhere and to see the advisability of taking steps to appropriate the plan on the part of its own community. This is also vision, and organizing ability; for appreciation of what has been done is vision, and the power to appropriate is organizing ability, or the ability to reinstate organizations. 'Beyond this there must be a reservoir of energy that speeds the work, and a sympathy with life which makes the undertaking seem desirable.

All of this assumes, of course, that somewhere there must be leaders of the creative kind, otherwise there would be no plans to borrow. And because of this we are able to see the reason why the democracy of community life is not forced to remain on a dead level. Given the creative power somewhere resident in society, and given the sympathetic, intelligent, initiating, imitative mind resident in all communities, and the power of the community, whether urban or rural, to lift itself to a higher level is provided for. As in the arena of national society the creative minds are passing down their ideas and plans to the masses of people, and the life of the whole people is thereby enabled to approximate the higher ideals of the talented class, so in rural communities the coöperative democracy may be heightened and improved by developing a resident leadership capable of appropriating the efficient plans of others.

#### POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP IN THE OPEN COUNTRY

It is a common saying that the country lacks leadership and no doubt it is true. But the same statement could be made successfully relative to the city, although it seems to have less force there. There are to be found in our cosmopolitan centers, and in lesser places also, wide areas, in some cases great aggregations of nation-

alities and submerged neighborhoods, where perhaps the most conspicuous deficiency is that of a competent and loyal leadership. When the objection is made that the interests of cities as cities are well looked after, that the ablest men in the nation are deeply interested in the direction of municipal business, it is sufficient to ask: Then why these waste places, these neglected warrens of headless populations in such centers? The existence of slums and of congested backward populations impeaches the pretended leadership in municipalities, and finds it guilty of lacking a fundamental recognition that the welfare of all alike is the interest of the city and of falling far short of just and humanitarian reconstruction.

It is possible, even likely, that, as compared with cities, there is an equal or greater amount of potential leadership in the country. The best indications point to the existence of an equal abundance of potential ability in all classes of normal people, and the conditions of life in rural districts are in favor of the country, since both advantageous conditions of health and the absence of a large percentage of the backward classes are decidedly in its favor.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the amount of talent possessed by society generally, and therefore by country districts, we have somewhat divergent estimates. In his studies of the amount of genius in England, Galton concluded that its ratio in the population is about 1 in 4,000. Lester F. Ward, on the other hand, as a result of his analysis of European studies, estimated that there must be 1 person in every 500 who is possessed of potential ability.<sup>2</sup> By potential ability, Ward meant the undeveloped inborn talent resident in populations, the greater portion of which never manifests itself by means of creative work. In his estimation, therefore, historic genius is but a fraction of the potential supply, while with Galton it constitutes the entire supply.

Applications of the Binet test to school children with a view to discovering the proportion of exceptional children gives support

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's *Constructive Rural Sociology*, Second edition, Chap. 7, on "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Farm Life," and his forthcoming study entitled *A Study in Social Dynamics*, Table I, where the rates of natural increase for rural and urban communities are computed for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> See "The Conservation of Talent Through Utilization," *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. I, 151-165, where the writer gives a more extended presentation of the data of these two writers.

to Ward's position. According to the reports from such investigations, unusual children number from 1 to 3 in each 100 of the school children tested, which for the population would be nearly 1 to 500. Both Ward's estimate and the latter are based on the inclusion of both sexes, while Galton's obtained for men exclusively.

According to the more liberal estimates, therefore, in rural neighborhoods having a few hundred inhabitants each, we might expect to find a number of individuals, who, if developed, would possess innovating ability. The problem, then, is one of training this talent so as to secure a due proportion of it for rural service.

As to the imitative class, since it contains the larger number of people, and since we may conclude that at least the higher grade members possess qualifications which would enable them to initiate, organize and direct community enterprises, we are warranted in concluding that the country contains an ample quota of such potential leadership. But as in the case of the potentially talented, the problem is one of arousing, educating and keeping these persons for duty in rural communities.

Up to the present time the country appears to have given the nation most of its great leaders in certain lines of life. The greatest military, political and industrial figures were, at least, country born. Potentially, their ability originated in the country. In its matured expression it bore the impress of urban manufacture. That its ultimate origin was rural may or may not reflect special credit on the country. For one thing, that origin is what would be expected when the rural population was numerically several times as great as the urban. Again, the great depository of indigenous inhabitants from whom leadership might be expected to emerge has been the country. On the other hand, it is asserted, without demonstrable certainty, in my opinion, that the matured country mind is "more original, more versatile, more accurate, more philosophical, more practical, more persevering, than the urban mind."<sup>3</sup> It must be admitted that the country is an advantageous place to rear children because of the very conspicuous absence of soliciting and demoralizing influences and of the presence of the habits of work and discipline practically every farm child is compelled to acquire.

<sup>3</sup> Scudder, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March, 1912, p. 177.

## THE MIGRATION OF RURAL LEADERS TO THE CITY

The country is unfortunate in suffering a large loss of potential ability of both the creative and imitative kind. During the decade, 1900-1910, rural districts saw an exodus to the cities of about 3,500,000 persons, a number which amounted to about 30 per cent of the total urban growth of the decade.<sup>4</sup> This would mean an annual loss to the country of about 350,000 souls, enough to make a city of approximately the size of Kansas City. On the one side we have the pull of the city, on the other the repulsion of the country. The city attracts and fascinates what a recent writer terms the "urban-minded" individuals,<sup>5</sup> and the country being distasteful to them or seeming to offer fewer advantages, acts as a repellant factor. One reply to a questionnaire, sent to students of the University of North Dakota, seeking to ascertain what those from rural districts thought of the country, a reply from a city youth who had lived in the country for a number of years, stated: "If God will forgive me I will never go back to the country." This, however, is not representative but symptomatic, but that there is a deep-seated preference for city life is evidenced by the fact that such great numbers of retired farmers move to neighboring towns.

Many of the ablest men and women are drawn away from farm life to the city through the instrumentality of the higher institutions of learning. An investigation I made a few years ago showed that few graduates of any such schools who originally came from the country return there to live. Normal schools, state universities and state agricultural colleges almost uniformly returned evidence that their graduates of the indicated class were settling in cities almost exclusively.<sup>6</sup> Only the agricultural colleges associated with universities made much headway toward the return of such graduates to rural regions.

## THE NEED FOR RURAL LEADERSHIP

The country possesses a genuine need of a qualified leadership for many kinds of undertakings. Representing as it does nearly one-half of the national population and nearly one-fourth of the

<sup>4</sup> Gillette, *Constructive Rural Sociology*, 2d edition, Chap. 5, p. 86; Gillette and Davies, *Publications American Statistical Association*, XIV, 649.

<sup>5</sup> "Psychic Causes of Rural Migration," Ernest R. Groves, *American Journal of Sociology*, XXI, 622-7.

<sup>6</sup> *Quarterly Journal University North Dakota*, I:67-79; and *American Journal of Sociology*, XVI: 645-67.



nation's wealth, the agricultural class is the most important single industrial and social class in the United States. Because no class is as completely and loyally represented by members of another class as by those of its own, farm populations should have more trained agriculturists in Congress, and they should have a more competent agricultural representation in state legislatures than they now have. As Fiske has said, there are seventy times more farmers than lawyers in the nation but the latter are far more influential in legislative matters.<sup>7</sup> Agriculture demands leaders, having economic insight and statesmanship qualities, rightly to organize and regulate institutions to carry on marketing of produce and the extension of a fair system of rural credit in behalf of farmers. For the improvement of agriculture it requires men living on farms who understand the best methods of production and who are able both to apply their knowledge and to stimulate others to imitate. In the work of betterment of home conditions and in advancing institutions and agencies which shall help overcome rural isolation and realize a socialized country life there is an urgent call for men and women having specialized training and leadership qualities. In so far as the country needs "redemption," if it is to be "redeemed," deliverance must come from the prophets of the rural peoples themselves, because, in the last resort, only a people is able to work out its own salvation.

#### TRAINING FOR RURAL LEADERSHIP

Hence we come to the problem of how to obtain a permanent, resident leadership in and for rural communities. Up to the present time, for community purposes, the country has depended on a transient leadership from the outside in the shape of itinerant preachers and teachers, and for purposes of production, on the occasional able farmer and the visiting expert. Due reflection over the situation leads us to think that such sources will never prove sufficient or efficient, and that what the country wants most is men and women who by their training are at one with farm life and whose influence is ever present because they live in the country and have their interests there.

Several kinds of agencies may contribute toward supplying a leadership of the right kind. Our institutions of higher learning

<sup>7</sup> *Challenge of the Country*, p. 121.

must devote more attention to training men and women for country service. Those which train pastors, teachers and Y. M. C. A. workers should establish courses of instruction, the content, spirit and emphasis of which will serve to specialize their students for constructive work in rural institutions. The nature of the rural community must be emphasized, its particular problems studied, and the agencies capable of supplementing and improving agricultural life receive much consideration. When training schools renounce the absurd notion that general training courses qualify equally well for rural and urban service, a great step in advance will have been taken. Educating individuals specifically for rural service has the double advantage of qualifying them to carry on constructive undertakings and of retaining them in that service because their qualifications tend to make them ineligible for urban positions.

Much is being accomplished by the county agent and the coöperative demonstrator which the agricultural colleges have educated for country service. The various states are, especially, placing many county agents in the field and they have proved themselves helpful in furthering not only production but community undertakings of different kinds. Many states have county and city high schools which are giving instruction in agriculture and farm subjects, and the occasional state agricultural high school is a still more intensified approach to the desired goal. Summer chautauquas with their lectures and instruction on farm life and with their visiting groups of farm boys and girls; farmers' institutes; farmers' clubs, and associations of farmers' clubs; and kindred organizations are helpfully contributing to the establishment of a constructive point of view concerning farm life and its problems.

However, the institution which is needed to reach the masses of country children and to do most to create an abiding interest in rural affairs is one which is located in the rural neighborhood, which touches and ministers to the lives of the residents daily, and which, filled with an agrarian content and spirit, exercises an abiding, moulding influence on the young in the direction of rural undertakings and improvement. The consolidated rural school, with communityized building and equipment, a corps of efficient teachers, a teacherage, experimental plot, graded and ruralized curriculum, and having high school facilities as an organic part of the

socialized course of instruction, possesses the greatest power of appeal because it is articulated with actual farm life and because it is within reach of all. Such an institution should stimulate the talented class toward higher achievements, tending to command the permanent interest of some members of that class in farm life, and develop the abler members of the imitative group up to the level of their greatest efficiency. It doubtless also would accomplish for the less able individuals all that any training agency could hope to do for them.